# A FEMINIST STUDY OF FOOD IN SELECT CULINARY NARRATIVES

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by

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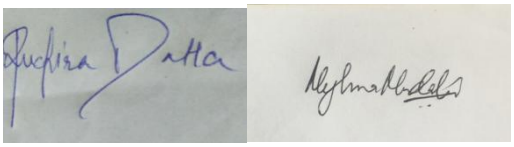

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**Abstract**

An academic study of food entails a study of food at the intersection of individual experience, socio-cultural significance and global politics of food. A study of the emerging genre of culinary narratives, therefore, is a study of women's experience of food, shaped by the socio-cultural context she occupies and its interaction with the world food scenario. This research titled "A Feminist Study of Food in Select Culinary Narratives" studies Indian immigrant women's relationship with food in the twenty-first century globalised, capitalist, multicultural, American society. The research places itself within the broader framework of literature, cultural and women's studies and focuses on the emerging genre of South-Asian diasporic culinary narratives. It, therefore, adds to the limited scholarship on the genre of diasporic culinary narratives by looking at the works of Shoba Narayan's *Monsoon Diary: A Memoir with Recipes (2003),*Amulya Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry* (2007), Bharti Kirchner's *Pastries: A Novel of Desserts and Discoveries (2009)* and Sandeepa Mukherjee Datta's *Bong Mom's Cookbook* (2013).Consequently, the research examines the various roles performed by food, as the immigrant woman navigates her geographical and cultural displacement. In this context, the research views food as a means for immigrant women to articulate their sense of 'self' and critiquing the standardization of women's relationship with food by the capitalist food industry. Moreover, critiques of capitalist notions of women's relationship with food further enables the select texts to re-envision women's relationship with the kitchen and domestic work. Finally, the study analyses select culinary narratives as paradoxical texts for its simultaneous critique of the commodification of ethnic culture and performance of "cultural self-commodification".

Keywords: culinary narratives, 'authentic', multiculturalism, 'self', "multiple consciousness", corporate food industry, food politics, gendered labour.

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## 1. Introduction- Background

Food is socio-culturally coded and therefore reflects the socio-cultural, economic, religious as well as political affiliations of individuals. As a result, a study of food is a study of the individual and the community. However, as Joan Fitzpatrick points out in her work "Food and Literature: An Overview", it was not until the twentieth century that academic scholars across disciplines sought to study food and its significance (120-3). In fact, Arlene Avakian in her work "Cooking Up Lives: Feminist Food Studies" argues that the works like Jean Anthelme Brillat Savarin The *Physiology of Taste or Transcendental Gastronomy* (1825), M.F.K Fisher's *The Gastronomical Me* (1943) and Julia Child's *The French Chef* (1963), gradually changed academic discourses' perception of food. Therefore, in the twenty-first century, academic scholarship on food is produced from within the fields of history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, cultural studies, gender studies and literature to name a few. Yet, even in the twenty-first century, women's relationship with food struggles for academic attention. Consequently, the purpose of this research is to add to the scholarship on women's writings on and about food by situating this study within the purview of literature, cultural, and women's studies.

This research focuses specifically on the genre of culinary narratives. This literary genre written mostly by women is characterised by women's personal, often lived experiences of food. However, scholars have often questioned the academic value of the genre of culinary narratives arguing that these narratives are too personal. Nevertheless, within the field of cultural studies, individual's culinary experiences is a valid means of studying the power-structures that are responsible for influencing the individual's food consumption process. Or, as Fabio Parasecoli suggests in his work "Food, Cultural

Studies and Popular Culture", the field of cultural studies, analyses the relationship between personal culinary experiences, culinary practices, cooking techniques, eating habits, recipes, as well as shopping lists to power-structures such as food industry, advertising industry, media and other socio-political institutions (274). Consequently, this research places its study of select culinary narratives within the broader framework of literature, cultural and women's studies. The following paragraph of this research synopsis will provide a description of what this research considers culinary narratives.

Patricia Caseburg in her study, "The Erotics of Consumption in Postmodern Culinary Narratives: A Look At *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Reckless Appetite*", describes culinary narratives as a contemporary form of women's writing which focuses on the "domestic art of cooking". Subsequently, Caseburg argues that the genre of culinary narratives, despite its focus on cooking, differs from conventional cookbooks and traces the root of the genre to unpublished women's journals containing snippets of their lives, alongside family recipes, homemade remedies, stitching directions and at times, family secrets (1-7). Extending Caseburg, this research argues that the genre of culinary narratives sets itself apart from conventional cookbooks not only in terms of its form. Rather, the genre of culinary narratives also differs from conventional discourses of food in terms of its representation of women's relationship with food. Unlike conventional discourses which standardise women's relationship with food, as mechanical and depersonalised, culinary narratives present food as a language of self-expression. This research identifies and lists the following as defining features of the genre of culinary narratives:

1. Focus on personal experiences rather than recipes - culinary narratives weave recipes into the plot of the narratives thereby focusing on the writer/character/producer's relationship with food. Writing in the context of women's culinary memoirs Traci Marie Kelly, in fact, argues that it is women's experience of food which takes precedence in these narratives, rendering recipes secondary, sometimes even optional (qtd in Avakian and Haber 21).

2. Food emerges as a language for self-expression - food in culinary narratives emerges as a language for self-expression transcending its conventional role of providing nutrition. Consequently, within the sub-genre of diasporic culinary narratives, food emerges as a means of expressing the immigrant's longing for their homeland.

3. Representation of women - unlike conventional discourses of food, culinary narratives offer a realistic description of women's relationship with food, thereby highlighting women's labour in the kitchen. Kate McLean in her work "Food and Gender" had argued that historically the domestic is a space where "women enjoy an amount of power and control far surpassing that which they exert over the public and political realms" (250-2). Consequently, culinary narratives emerge as a space within which women's relationship with food and kitchen is articulated from women's point of view.

While these features define the genre of culinary narratives, for the purpose of studying the select culinary narratives, it is important to also note the features of the sub-genre of South-Asian diasporic culinary narratives.

Anita Mannur in her work *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture* (2010), states that the sub-genre of South Asian diasporic culinary fiction emerged after the changes in immigration laws in the United States of America. In 1965, America

changed its immigration laws to allow South Asian immigrants to naturalise as citizens of the state. As such, changed laws led to a rise in the population of South Asian immigrants in the United States of America and subsequently to production of culinary narratives in America. However, it was not until the twenty-first century that research scholars and academiciansengaged with the genre of diasporic culinary narratives and recognised these texts as a space for understanding ethnic cultures, for analysing women's lives and finally for analysing gender norms associated with the process of production and consumption of food. In fact, academicians Jennifer Cognard-Black, Mellisa A. Goldthwaite and Barbara Frey Waxman have argued the importance of looking at women's culinary memoirs for its critical engagement with concepts such as culture, ethnicity, class, identity, ecological concerns and gender. In this sense, scholars of diasporic culinary narratives suggest that produced in the twenty-first century American society the genre can be read as a critique of the commodification of ethnic food and culture perpetuated by the globalised capitalist, multicultural American society. Consequently, this research extends Mannur's study by offering a comparative study of the nuances of the sub-genres of diasporic culinary narratives while also borrowing critical frameworks from Mannur's work to analyse women's relationship with 'authentic', ethnic food as a product of their cultural and geographic displacement in the select diasporic culinary narratives.

**Need for Study**

This research notes that despite the changed immigration laws, the twenty-first century American society fails to assimilate ethnic minorities. Or rather, the twenty-first century American society practices commodification of ethnic culture and thereby fails to accept the cultural differences of the ethnic communities living in the host country. The

select culinary narratives, as products of the twenty-first century American society, highlight the host country's practice of accepting palatable cultural difference. Moreover, the corporate food industry along with the conventional discourses of food is also responsible for categorising women as mere producers of food in the twenty-first century American society. Consequently, the select culinary narratives also critique the capitalist associations made between women and food. In other words, this study is relevant for its analysis of immigrant women's relationship with ethnic food in contemporary American society. The study is also relevant for addressing the below mentioned research gap.

**Research Gap**

This research analyses Shoba Narayan's *Monsoon Diary: A Memoir with Recipes*(2003), Amulya Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry* (2007), Bharti Kirchner's *Pastries: A Novel of Desserts and Discoveries* (2009) and Sandeepa Mukherjee Datta's *Bong Mom's Cookbook* (2013),to address the following research gaps:

1. Address research gap on the genre of South Asian diasporic culinary narratives and more specifically on the select texts.

2. Provide a comparative analysis of the sub-genres of culinary memoir and culinary fiction to understand how the articulation of subjectivity is influenced by the generic difference between life-writing and fiction.

3. Extend the limited scholarship on diasporic culinary narratives to suggest that culinary narratives are not mere personal accounts but rather critiques of dominant discourses of food.

4. Offer academic scholarship to read the genre as well as the select culinary narratives as critiques of the socio-political context in which they are produced.

**Thesis Statement**

The select twenty-first century, diasporic, culinary narratives emerge as paradoxical texts, representing the immigrant women's constant negotiation with objective categories such as 'authentic', ethnic food, ethnic culture, 'self' and domestic kitchen within the texts.

**Objectives:**

1. To read women's relationship with 'ethnic' food in select culinary narratives as a paradoxical response to the "popular multiculturalism" practised in twenty-first century American society.

2. To critically compare the paradoxically, multiple sense of 'self' articulated in select culinary fictions and memoirs as a "positive sensation" despite the select fiction's attempt to resolve the conflicting perception of 'self' among immigrant women.

3. To examine how a critique of the twenty-first century capitalist notion of "woman in the kitchen" in the select culinary narratives paradoxically reaffirms women's gendered role within domestic spaces in the narratives.

**2. Review of Literature**

The available literature on the area of study helped identify existing research gaps and subsequently offers supporting arguments for analysing the select texts. The reviewed articles in this research are classified into the following sub-categories:

1. Food, Authenticity, Globalisation, and Multiculturalism - the reviewed articles in this section offer a critique of the global politics of food from women's perspective. The articles help understand how the terms globalisation and multiculturalism is used by the American society to refer to its fondness for ethnic cuisine and hide its failure to accept cultural difference. Consequently, the articles help understand 'authentic' ethnic cuisine

or food as a twenty-first century invention to address the commodification of ethnic culture and cuisine by the globalised, capitalist American economy. The articles further help recognise the immigrant's quest for authenticity as a byproduct of the seeming multiculturalism practiced in twenty-first century, globalised, 'multicultural', American society. The articles reviewed in this research include:

(i) "Going for An Indian: South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain" by Elisabeth Buettner

(ii) "As Mother Made It: The Cosmopolitan Indian Family, 'Authentic' Food and the Construction of Cultural Utopia" by Tulasi Srinivas

(iii) "I Guarantee: Betty Crocker to The Woman in The Kitchen" by Laura Shapiro

(iv)"Desperately Seeking Authenticity: But What Would an "Authentic" Cookbook Really Look Like?" by Rachel Laudan

(v) "Hiding Gender and Race in the Discourse of Commercial Food Consumption" by Alice P Julier

2. Culinary Autobiographies/Memoirs - the reviewed articles help understand the genre of culinary narratives as personal as well as ethnographic texts. Moreover, these articles explain how food emerges as a means of remembering the ethnic homeland within the genre of diasporic culinary memoirs. The articles in this section highlight the features of culinary autobiographies/memoirs to help distinguish the sub-genre of culinary narratives from the conventional discourse of food. Or rather, the articles in this section demonstrate how food transcends its nutritional value and emerges as a means of articulation of 'self' within the sub-genre of culinary memoirs. Subsequently, the articles also provide a

framework for studying the select culinary autobiographies in this research. The reviewed articles in this section include:

(i) Cooking Up Lives: Feminist Food Memoirs" by Arlene Avakian Haber

(ii) "Food Memoirs: What They Are? Why They Are Popular and Why They Belong in the Literature Classroom" by Barbara Frey- Waxman

(iii) "Books That Cook: Teaching Food and Food Literature in the English Classroom" By Jennifer Cognard-Black, Mellisa A. Goldthwaite

(iv) "Mangoes and Coconuts and Grandmothers': Food In Transatlantic South Asian Writing" by Ruth Maxley

(v) "Chop Taste and Read: Examining Stephanie Alexander's Diary Cookbooks" by Sian Supski

(vi) "Recipe for Remembrance: Memory and Identity in African American Women's Cookbook" by Rosalyn Collings Eves

(vii) "Food, Memory and Everyday Transnationalism in Chitrita Banerji's Culinary Memoirs" by Sucharita Sarkar

3. Culinary Fiction - The reviewed articles in this section provide an understanding of the genre of culinary fictions and the required framework for analysing select culinary fiction. These articles help understand how food emerges as a means of creativity and self-expression within culinary fictions. Consequently, the articles in this section are crucial for understanding food as a language, since the reviewed articles discuss the role of food metaphors in works of fiction. Moreover, the reviewed articles in this section also help re-look the role of kitchen in culinary fictions. The articles reviewed in this section include:

(i) *Culinary Fiction: Food in South-Asian Diasporic Culture* by Anita Mannur

(ii) “Developing an Appetite for Food in Crime Fiction” by Rachel Franks

4. Life writing - the reviewed articles in this section offers the means of studying an individual’s lived experiences. The articles suggest that there has been an increase in the production of memoirs as individuals view the genre as a platform for validating their experiences. An article such as Vivian Gornick’s “Why Memoir Now” suggests that the writers of memoirs must focus on providing an individual's lived “emotional truth” rather than a factual account of an individual’s life (4-5). Finally, the articles help understand the genre of life-writing as a space for self-reflection as well as challenging dominant versions of history. The reviewed articles in this section include:

(i) “Why Memoir Now” by Vivian Gornick

(ii) “Confessions and Transgressions: Ethics and Life Writing” by Martha Montello

(iii) “Translation as Hoax: Art, Othering and Life Writing” by P. P. Raveendran

(iv) “Rethinking the Personal Narrative Life Writing and Composition Pedagogy” by Deborah Mutnick

(v) “The Other: A Study of the Persona in Several Contemporary Women’s Autobiographies” by Jan Zlotnik Schmidt

(vi)“Emigrant Selves: Narrative Strategies in Three Women's Autobiographies” by Sarah Gilead

5. Kitchen, Cooking and Women’s Labour - the articles in this section help understand the need to highlight women’s naturalised domestic labour. The select articles demonstrate that despite modernisation and technological advancement in the twenty-first century, globalised, ‘multicultural’ American society fails to re-envision the kitchen as a

space free of women's domestic labour. Consequently, the articles also highlight the need to recognise women's domestic labour as productive work. Moreover, the articles in this section help recognise the need to document immigrant, working-class women's relationship with food. The reviewed articles in this section include:

(i) "Televised Divo? Televised Treatments of Masculinity, Femininity and Food" by Rebecca Swenson

(ii) "On the Move for Food: Three Women Behind the Tomato's Journey" by Deborah Brandtt

(iii) "Unpaid Work: Women and the Burden of Unpaid Work" by Vineet John Samuel

(iv)"Masala Matters: Globalization, Female Food Entrepreneurs, and the Changing Politics of Provisioning by Tulasi Srinivas

**3. Methods and Methodology**

This research uses a combination of textual and discourse analysis to study the selected texts. Broadly, this research looks at the discourse of food studies focusing specifically on women's writing on and about food.

Subsequently, the research uses textual analysis to articulate its research arguments and support them with textual evidence. As such, the use of a combination of textual and discourse analysis further enables this research to place its study of the select women's culinary narrative within the broader purview of twenty-first century global politics of food, culture and ethnicity.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Arlene Avakian's in her essay "Cooking Up Lives: Feminist Food Memoirs" emphasises the need to study the impact of women's gender, race, class and other socio-

cultural factors on their relationship with food. Avakian states that a feminist food memoir is critical of the way an individual's ethnicity, class, and gender identity interacts with and resists dominant socio-cultural systems (282-3). As a result, culinary narratives are often accounts of resistance against dominant power structures rather than mere personal narratives. Jennifer Cognard-Black, Melisa A. Goldthwaite, Barbara Frey Waxman and Ruth Maxley in their respective essays on women's culinary memoirs further describe the memoirs as complex narratives rich in cultural value and emotional depth and therefore belong literature classrooms. Consequently, this research borrows theoretical frameworks from the fields of sociology, literature and women's studies in its attempt to analyse the select culinary narratives.

Primarily, this research borrows the notion of "popular multiculturalism" and "cultural self-commodification" from Anita Mannur's *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture* to highlight the first paradox of the select culinary narratives. Mannur argues that culinary narratives are "literary interventions" and diasporic writers strategically commodify ethnic foodways to create "palatable narratives of otherness". Or rather, Mannur argues that the practice of "popular multiculturalism" or the practice of accepting "palatable ethnic and racial difference" necessitates the use of "cultural self-commodification" in narratives about ethnic food and culture (82-3). However, despite borrowing Mannur's argument, the research is suspect of "cultural self-commodification" performed by diasporic writers in select culinary narratives.

Consequently, the research suggests that "cultural self-commodifciation" often manifests itself in the form of an immigrant writer's or character's quest for 'authentic' ethnic culture and food. In this context the research uses Rachel Laudan's notion of "our-

thentic" from her article "Desperately Seeking Authenticity: But What Would an 'Authentic' Cookbook Really Look Like" to argue the impossibility of ethnic culture or cuisine (4). Or rather, extending Laudan the research argues that the term 'authentic' is a construct based on the authenticator's personal biases and therefore the only true possibility is our version of authenticity.

The research further suggests that the quest for authenticity is not only futile, but it also causes stress and anxiety in urban immigrant women. Borrowing Tulasi Srinivas' notion of "ethnic-Indianess" appearing in her work "As Mother Made It: The Cosmopolitan Indian Family, 'Authentic' Food and the Construction of Cultural Utopia" the research demonstrates how urban immigrant women stress over their failure to provide ethnically appropriate meals for their second generation immigrant children. Extending Srinivas, the research argues that by stressing over their role as the provider of home cooked ethnic meals, the immigrant women paradoxically reiterate their conventional gender roles as nurturers and caregivers.

The research further uses Sumana Cooppan's notion of "multiple consciousness" from her work "Creating Consciousness and Inventing Identity: An Examination of Self-Perception, Multiple Consciousness and the Process of South Asian Diasporic Identity Formation in Selected Works by Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni". Reading the select texts through the lens of "multiple consciousness" help demonstrate the second paradox, which alludes to an immigrant women's sense of 'self' as paradoxically multiple. Cooppan's notion is an extension of W.E.B DuBois notion of "dual consciousness". While DuBois viewed the "dual consciousness" as a negative sensation, Cooppan argues that the immigrant's conflicted perception of 'self' is a

positive sensation. In other words, Cooppan seems to suggest that the multiplicity 'self' further enables women to navigate conflicting notions of culture, identity and home. Cooppan's notion of "multiple consciousness" is developed through her study of Indian-immigrant women characters in the works of Indian immigrant women writers. The research, therefore, borrows Cooppan's theory of "multiple consciousness" to study the conflicted perception of 'self' experienced by the women in the select diasporic culinary narratives.

Consequently, the chapter uses Rosalyn Collings Eves' notion of "memorialising the individual through community" from her essay "Recipe for Remembrance: Memory and Identity in African AmericanWomen's Cookbook" to suggest that the select culinary narratives document individual lived experiences as well as the experiences of the women of their community. Eves states that women rarely write about themselves without invoking other women of their community, to demonstrate that their lives are intertwined (233-9). In this sense, Eves' work offers a critical framework for analysing the select women's culinary memoirs. Moreover, Eves' essay is also crucial for analysing the select culinary narratives as counter-narratives, recording the experiences of ordinary women and challenging dominant historical discourses.

The research further extends Laura Shapiro's critique of the notion of "woman in the kitchen" manufactured by the capitalist American society in her essay "I Guarantee: From Betty Crocker to the Woman in The Kitchen. Shapiro's essay suggests that the rising corporate food system in twentieth century American society "depersonalised" women's relationship with food, viewing women as machines for converting packaged food into family meals (32-5). Consequently, extending Shapiro, the research argues that

the twenty-first century, globalised, capitalist, American society continues to "depersonalise" women's relationship with food. The research further uses Shapiro's critique of the capitalist American society to demonstrate the third paradox of this research, arguing that a critique of the capitalist notion of "woman in the kitchen" by the select culinary narratives inadvertently reaffirms women's conventional relationship with food in these texts.

The research uses Rebecca Swenson's critique of the gendering of kitchen space in twenty-first century cooking shows on Food Network in her work "Televised Divo? Televised Treatments of Masculinity, Femininity and Food". Swenson states that the network uses "subtle camera positioning", costume and lighting to make a clear distinction between the professional kitchen occupied male hosts and domestic kitchen occupied female hosts (139). Swenson's analysis of the professional and domestic kitchen on Food Network is crucial for asserting that conventional discourses of food continue to perpetuate and promote conventional notions of gender roles.

Apart from the above mentioned notions, the research also uses Ketu Katrak's notion of women's writings as examples of women re-authoring "dominant histories", from Katrak's work *Theorizing a Politics of the Female Body,* to understand the genre of culinary narratives as critiques of their socio-cultural context rather than mere personal narratives. The research subsequently uses Alice P Julier's critique of the twenty-first century American food industry in her essay "Hiding Gender and Race in the Discourse of Commercial Food Consumption" to support Shapiro's critique of the "depersonalisation" of women's relationship with food in capitalist American society. Since this research studies the genre of culinary narratives as a critique of twenty-first

century capitalist American society, the research further uses Deborah Brandt's essay "On the Move for Food: Three Women Behind the Tomato's journey" to highlight the need to look at the exploitation of immigrant, working class women by the corporate food industry in the twenty-first century capitalist American society. The research also uses Brandt's study to highlight that gendering of domestic work persists within immigrant families of other socio-economic classes. Consequently, extending Brandt's study the research argues the need for the genre of culinary narratives to record the experience of immigrant, working class women and recognise their labour. In this context, the research also uses Vineet John Samuel's article "Unpaid Work: Women and the Burden of Unpaid Work" to suggest the need to recognise women's labour within the corporate food industry as well as women's domestic labour.

As such, this research extends the borrowed concepts, notions and theories to analyse the select culinary narratives within the purview of literature, culture and women's studies.

## 4. Analysis

### Chapter 1 "Introduction"

The first chapter of this research is the introductory chapter and discusses the objective of the study along with the methods and methodology used to study the select primary texts. As such, the introductory chapter is essential for establishing the relevance of this study. The chapter is sub-divided into following parts:

Background - introduces the historical context within which this research situates the study and outlines the focus areas of the study

Research gap - identifies and lists the existing research gap

Primary texts - introduces the select culinary narratives to be studied

Thesis statement - articulate the central argument of this research

Objectives - lists the objectives of the study

Review of literature - provides a detailed review of relevant articles

Methods and Methodology - describes the method of study along with the relevant theoretical frameworks

Limitations - lists the expected limitations of the study

Chapter Division - provides an outline of the chapters of this research

Conclusion - connects the need for study with the articulated research objectives

**Chapter 2 "The Paradox of Multiculturalism: Authenticity, Culinary Guilt and Sense of Unbelonging"**

The first analytical chapter of this research demonstrates how immigrant women's relationship with food in the select narratives emerges as a response to the practice of "popular multiculturalism" in the twenty-first century American society (Mannur 83). This chapter consequently looks at the first of the three paradoxes which characterise the select culinary narratives. The chapter is crucial for recognising that the immigrant writer's desire to represent ethnic culture for the "mainstream American" society begets "cultural self-commodification" (83-6). The primary arguments of this chapter are as follows:

The Legitimisation of Authenticity: Multiculturalism, Globalisation and Ethnic Food - The chapter begins looking at the definition of multiculturalism as provided by Pramod K Nayar in his work *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction*. Borrowing Nayar's notion of multiculturalism as peaceful co-existence of multiple cultures, the chapter offers a

critique of the twenty-first century, 'multicultural' American society using the select culinary narratives (54). Consequently, the chapter argues that a critique of the practice of capitalist "popular multiculturalism" which commodifies "palatable" ethnic culture and food is followed by the immigrant's performance of exaggerated or 'authentic' ethnic culture in the select culinary narratives (Mannur 83-6). Extending Mannur, the chapter further argues that despite being a response to "popular multiculturalism" the immigrant's quest for 'authentic' ethnic culture in the twenty-first century American society is futile.

Culinary Guilt over "Ethnic-Indianess": Resisting Commodification or Reiterating Gender Roles? - This chapter further argues that immigrant women, specifically, experience a sense of anxiety or stress over their desire to uphold 'authentic' ethnic culture through' authentic' ethnic food. Subsequently, the failure to prepare 'authentic' ethnic food for their family creates a sense of culinary guilt for the immigrant women in the select culinary narratives. Or, as Tulasi Srinivas argues, immigrant women view their failure to provide home cooked ethnic meal as a failure to be a good mother to their second generation immigrant children. Srinivas, therefore, suggests that the performance of an exaggerated version of "ethnic Indianness" by regularly preparing ethnically appropriate meals is the cause of culinary guilt in Indian immigrant women (198-9). For instance, *Bong Mom's Cookbook* by Sandeepa Mukherjee Datta talks about her fear of being judged as a "new bong mom" and her subsequent stressful attempt to prepare ethnic dinner for forty guests (120-1). Extending Srinivas, the chapter argues that immigrant women's sense of guilt highlights women's internalisation of their conventional gender roles as mother, caregivers and nurturers. As a result, the quest for

'authentic' ethnic food to resist cultural assimilation into the host country paradoxically perpetuates women's gender roles in the select culinary narratives. Nevertheless, the chapter also notes how the first and second generation immigrants differ in terms of their relationship with ethnic food.

Second Generation Immigrants and Paradox of Multiculturalism - As such, while first generation immigrants experience nostalgia over ethnic food, second generation immigrants view ethnic food as an impediment to their desire for cultural assimilation into the host country. The chapter argues that the second generation immigrant's desire to reconcile their perception of ethnic identity conflicted by their American upbringing creates a sense of unbelonging towards their ethnic homeland as well as the host country. In other words, the practice of "popular multiculturalism" results in the American society's failure to assimilate second generation immigrants. Consequently, despite the American society's legal attempt to assimilate the second generation immigrants, the society paradoxically causes a sense of unbelonging in them. However, the chapter also observes that as adults the second generation immigrants lose their initial detachment from ethnic food and even return to it as a source of comfort and a symbolic reminder of their childhood. This is quite evident in the protagonist of the primary text *Serving Crazy with Curry* when Devi chooses to learn how to cook ethnic food to express her gratitude towards her mother. In fact, Ruth Maxley in her work "Mangoes and Coconuts and Grandmothers: Food in Transatlantic South Asian Writing" suggests that, as an adult, the second generation immigrants find the "spicy smell" of ethnic food "reassuring" (184). Finally, the chapter ends by pointing out that despite the second generation immigrant's

initial resistance towards ethnic food, both first and second generation immigrants view ethnic food as means for asserting their sense of 'self' in the select culinary narratives.

**Chapter 3 Homogeneous Identity to Multiple Consciousness: Immigrant Women's Sense of 'Self'**

The second analytical chapter of this research builds on the idea of food as a means of articulating immigrant women's sense of 'self' in the select culinary narratives. The second chapter of this research analyses the second paradox which alludes to the immigrant women's paradoxical sense of 'self' resulting from the attempt to navigate their geographical and cultural displacement in the host country. This chapter demonstrates that though the first and second generation immigrants perceive the 'self' as paradoxically multiple, the generic difference between memoirs and fiction further determines the narrative's form for depicting first and second generation immigrant's conflicted sense of identity This chapter, therefore, contributes towards the larger research objective of offering a comparative study of culinary memoirs and fiction. The primary arguments of this chapter are outlined in the following manner:

Homogeneity vs. Multiplicity: Immigrant Women's Discovery of Multiple Selves -The chapter begins with an examination of the multiple conflicts experienced by first and second generation immigrants. The chapter suggests that food enables immigrants to articulate their conflicted perception of 'self'. For instance, Bharti Kirchner's culinary narrative *Pastries* begins with the line "I, Sunuya Malhotra, am a woman who lives to bake" (1). The chapter, however, argues that the 'self' is rarely a unified entity and food enables women to reconcile the contradictory perceptions of 'self' as a legitimate identity. Using Sumana Cooppan's notion of "multiple consciousness" the chapter further

argues that the immigrant women's conflicted sense of 'self' is a "positive sensation" which enables them to accept the 'self' as multiple rather than an unified entity (27-9). The chapter offers a comparative study of the first and second generation immigrants to suggest that in select culinary fiction, a specific incident causes the second generation immigrant to perceive the multiplicity of 'self' as "positive sensation". However, the select memoirs are driven by the first generation immigrant's perception of 'self' as paradoxically, multiple.

The Multiplicity of the 'Self' Remembered -The chapter notes that in select culinary fictions, despite portraying the immigrant's multiplicity of 'self' as a "positive sensation", the fiction writers paradoxically provide a resolution for the protagonist's contradictory perceptions of 'self'. In contrast, the writers of the select culinary memoirs are self-aware of their multiplicity of 'self'. In fact, Sucharita Sarkar suggests that memoir writers acknowledge their "transnational location" and demonstrate their everyday negotiations with their cultural and geographic displacement rather than attempting to resolve the contradictions which characterise their sense of 'self' (92-5). Consequently, memoir writers attempt to document their transnational experiences while also memorialising their ethnic community. In other words, the chapter applies available frameworks on culinary autobiographies and life-writing to analyse food as a means of articulating an individual's lived reality rather than an accurately remembered account of their past, in the select culinary narratives.

Reclaiming The Individual, Reclaiming Community - Finally, extending Rosalyn Collings Eves' notion of "memorialising the individual through community ", the chapter states that the immigrant women in both, culinary fiction and culinary memoir, offer a

representation of their ethnic community while documenting their individual experiences (233). Writing in the context of African-American women's cookbooks, Eves further argued that women's cookbooks reflect community lives rather than mere individual lived experiences, thereby critiquing conventional historical discourses which fail to document women's experiences (239-40). In this sense, Eves makes an argument similar to Ketu Katrak, who in her work *Theorizing a Politics of the Female Body* argued thatwomen writers often use "different forms of personal narratives" to articulate their experiences not only to challenge "dominant histories" but to re-author them" (15-23). Consequently, extending Eves and Katrak, this chapter argues that by memorialising women of their community through their recipes, the genre of culinary narratives also offers a critique of dominant historical discourse. Or rather, Finally, the chapter concludes that despite the difference in their form, culinary fictions, as well as memoirs, are paradoxical texts which represent the immigrant women's paradoxical 'self'.

**Chapter 4 "The Woman in the Kitchen: Reclaiming Food, Kitchen and Domestic Labour"**

The last analytical chapter of this research critiques the image of the "woman in the kitchen" popularised by the conventional discourse of food. The final paradox of this chapter alludes to the reaffirmation of women's gendered relationship with food in the select culinary narratives, inadvertently resulting from the narrative's attempt to critique the capitalist notion of "woman in the kitchen". This chapter, not unlike the first analytical chapter, offers a critique of the globalised, capitalist, 'multicultural' American society. However, this chapter is crucial for understanding the role of capitalism in defining and standardising women's relationship with food within the twenty-first

century American society. The primary arguments of this chapter are outlined in the following manner:

Cooking Without Domesticating Food: Reclaiming Food in Culinary Narratives - Borrowing the phrase "woman in the kitchen" from the title of Laura Shapiro's essay, this chapter offers a critique of the notion of "woman in the kitchen; manufactured in post World War II America, to benefit the rising capitalist food industry in the country (29-30). Extending Shapiro, the chapter argues that while the capitalist food industry standardised women's relationship with food as mechanical and depersonalised, women in the select culinary narratives critique the corporate food industry by asserting food as a language of self-expression. This chapter, however, suggests that a critique of the standardisation of women's relationship with food by capitalist food industry relies on women's internalisation of their gendered role as producers of family meals. Or rather, the chapter notes that despite women's unhappiness with packaged meals offered by the corporate food industry, women do not seem to challenge their position within the domestic space in the select culinary narratives.

Re-looking At The Kitchen Space: Professional Kitchen vs. Domestic Kitchen - consequently, the chapter also challenges the gendering of the kitchen space by conventional discourses of food, such as the twenty-first century cooking shows on American television channel Food Network. The chapter uses Rebecca Swensons's essay, "Televised Divo? Televised Treatments of Masculinity, Femininity and Food", to understand how cooking shows on Food Network reiterate gendered notions of domestic and professional kitchens to protect conventional notions of masculinity and femininity (135). The chapter argues that in contrast to the twenty-first century cooking shows, the

narratives critique the gendering of the kitchen space. The narratives suggest that while cooking shows fail to envision the domestic kitchen as a space free of women's domestic labour, women often view the kitchen as a space for artistic expression as well as self-expression. Moreover, using Bharti Kirchner's novel *Pastries*, the chapter further demonstrates that women who occupy professional kitchens further view it as a space for articulating personal concerns. Similarly, in Shoba Narayan's *Monsoon Diary : A Memoir with Recipes* the kitchen, a recurrent motif in her work, emerges as a space laced with memories of her life rather than a space meant for performing gender roles.

Re-looking Women's Domestic Labour as Productive Work- Since the kitchen is re-envisioned in the select culinary narratives, the chapter further re-envision women's invisibilised domestic labour that is often naturalised as care, love or familial duty. Quoting Vineet John Samuel's article "Unpaid Work: Women and the Burden of Unpaid Work", the chapter argues the need to recognise women's domestic labour as affective, as well as productive work. The chapter further argues that it is not only important to question the naturalisation of women's domestic labour but also critically engage with the plight of immigrant, working-class women's labour within the capitalist food industry. The chapter further suggests that while women doing low-paid jobs in the food industry view their work as a means of survival, they unwittingly challenge the stereotypes that sustain the notion of the "woman in the kitchen". Therefore, the final chapter of this research recommends the genre of culinary narratives to study and record working-class women's labour within twenty-first century capitalist societies.

**Chapter 5 "Conclusion"**

The concluding chapter of this research demonstrates how the study has achieved its set research objectives. The chapter also provides an understanding of the limitations of the study while simultaneously articulating the scope for future research.

**5. Conclusion of the Study**

This research concludes that the select culinary narratives are paradoxical texts primarily because a critique of the multiculturalism practiced in the twenty-first century American society by the select culinary narratives involves the use of "cultural self-commodification". Subsequently, the research argues that select narratives are paradoxical texts that reflect the immigrant women's perception of 'self' as paradoxically multiple. Moreover, the study notes that the 'self' articulated in select culinary fiction, as well as memoirs, by first and second generation immigrants is characterised by a fractured, conflicted sense of identity. Or rather, the generic difference does not affect the immigrant women's perception of 'self', merely the manner in which they experience and articulate their conflicted identity. Finally, the research concludes that the selected texts are paradoxical because the select culinary narrative's critique of the capitalist notion of women as mere producers of family meals inadvertently reaffirms women's conventional gender roles within these texts. As a result, the research is skeptical of the women's attempt to reclaim their relationship with food and kitchen in the select narratives, even though the narratives critique the depersonalisation of women's relationship with food by the corporate food industry.

Nevertheless, this research successfully addresses the research gap by offering academic scholarship on the select culinary narratives as well as the genre of culinary narratives. The research not only establishes the select culinary narratives as critiques of

the capitalist, American society but also as critiques of dominant historical discourses. In doing so, the study demonstrates that culinary narratives are not mere personal accounts, rather these texts critically engage with the socio-political context in which they are produced. The research also offers a comparative study of select culinary fiction and memoirs. Finally, the research points out the need for the genre of culinary narratives to be more inclusive in its attempt to document the experiences of immigrant women in the twenty-first century, American society.

**Limitations**

This research lists the following as limitations of the study:

1. As an emerging genre, culinary narratives lack academic review and scholarship, making the area of research novel yet a relatively unchartered territory.

2. A limited number of texts within the genre of culinary narratives, especially when looking at the Indian diaspora in the United States of America.

3. The select culinary narratives offer limited critical insight into the characters class struggle, necessitating a look at struggles of working-class women.

**Scope for Future research:**

1. Need for scholarship on the sub-genre of Indian diaspora in the United States of America as well as the select culinary narratives.

2. Future scholarship should add to the available culinary epistemology and broaden the frameworks, concepts and terminology used to read women's relationship with food and kitchen.

3. Studies of the genre of culinary narratives might be combined with ecological studies to critique the systemic oppression of natural sources of food as well as indigenous communities by the corporate food industry.

4. Studying and documenting experiences of women who have limited means of articulating their experiences in written forums, especially working-class women and their experience of food.

5. Studying the genre of culinary narratives can be combined with quantitative studies (ethnographic) in order to be inclusive in nature.

6. Studies of women's experience with food (working-class or otherwise) should be critical of the category 'woman' and should include experiences of women other than cis-gendered women

7. Study of culinary narratives needs to be placed within the broader framework of food and cultural studies to study these narratives as literary as well as cultural texts.

8. Finally, culinary narratives should be studied/included in literature classrooms to expand the way we look at food, gender and culture in the twenty-first century.

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